

# **Quad City Times**

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## **Vilsack aims at Iowa's 'Great Places' By Charlotte Eby**

DES MOINES — Gov. Tom Vilsack unveiled details Monday of his "Great Places" initiative, a program that will help Iowans create innovative and culturally vibrant communities and, he hopes, stop the exodus of college graduates to other states.

His plan, which will have to gain legislative approval, would spend \$8 million in new money to help communities develop attractions or amenities that add to the quality of life for residents.

"Great places mean different things to different people," Vilsack said. "We all know great places in Iowa. We have a responsibility to preserve them, capitalize on them, learn from them, help them become even greater."

Local groups will be able to present an idea to a Great Places "coach," who will listen to their plan and put together a team of state agencies that can help connect them to state resources.

Community projects will have until July to apply for help through the Great Places project. A citizen advisory council appointed by Vilsack will select three "Great Places" pilot projects by October.

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs Director Anita Walker said the program challenges Iowans to "recognize, celebrate and capitalize on what is good and wonderful about Iowa."

"It could be a downtown main street with a story, it could be an urban center or a neighborhood. These are great places, or potentially great places," she said.

Vilsack said the Great Places plan continues the success of Vision Iowa, a program that brought new tourism and cultural attractions to 170 communities and led to \$2 billion in new investment.

"It has expanded dramatically the number of cultural and recreational opportunities in our state, and it has put us in a position to make a case to younger Iowans to stay here," he said.

The state also has launched a marketing campaign touting Iowa's quality of life with billboards and newspaper ads that aim to attract new residents and retain those already living here.

Vilsack said he has received positive reaction to ads that were shown on the giant TV screen at the state high school basketball tournaments in Des Moines over recent weeks.

"People were very interested and excited to see that we were actually aggressively promoting the state, particularly to our young people," he said.

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## **REGIONAL FORUMS**

The Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs will be sponsoring "Great Places" forums in eight regions around the state this spring.

The schedule includes forums in these cities:

Muscatine: May 26; Clear Lake: May 17; Spencer: May 18; Council Bluffs: May 19; Pella: May 24; Cedar Falls: May 25; Cedar Rapids: June 1; Des Moines: June 2

People who want more information about the Great Places program should call the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs at (515) 281-7471.